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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (04/30): UNITY TALKS "POSTPONED"

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Main Stories:  
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Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida lead with news of the Jerusalem Municipality issuing demolition orders for two buildings in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. According to coverage, these houses were built recently in by the Armenian Orthodox Church to house priests traveling from the Vatican with the Pope for his May visit to the city. Palestinian Authority Official for Jerusalem Affairs Abdul Qadir noted that Christian church leaders have requested that his office intervene in the matter and pursue legal recourse.

Al-Ayyam leads with news on recent developments in Palestinian unity talks that have been "postponed" until mid-May. According to coverage that also appears on Al-Quds' front page, Palestinian factions have agreed to a fifth round of talks to achieve "tangible results" regarding the issues of forming a national consensus government, security and Palestinian Authority elections. Reporting also concludes that factions have achieved some progress regarding PLO reform by forming an ad hoc committee to prepare for elections to the PLO's Palestinian National Council. The "postponement" of unity talks was the lead story in all dailies on April 29.

All front pages report on protests that took place in several Palestinian villages on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of the "Nakba" on April 29. The dailies run lead photos of protesters holding Palestinian flags and signs reading, "Your [Israeli]Independence is our Nakba [catastrophe]" along with signs listing the names of Palestinian villages that have been destroyed or renamed since the establishment of Israel in 1948.

All front pages highlight Palestinian Authority(PA) Premier Fayyad's April 29 meeting with a delegation of EU diplomatic mission chiefs in Ramallah. In comments to the press, EU representatives saluted

Fayyad's implementation of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan based on the principles of good governance and the rule of law. The representatives also stressed the importance of making good on financial pledges to the PA to enable Fayyad to achieve greater progress in the reform plan. Fayyad reiterated Palestinian demands that Israel respect signed agreements, halt settlements and military incursions in order to allow for a two-state solution. He also repeated the official position that, "these conditions are crucial to restoring the credibility of the peace process and ending occupation and enabling our people to establish an independent state with Jerusalem its capital," according to coverage.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida runs an AFP story on President Obama's congratulatory remarks on Israel's Independence Day on April 29. The story notes that Obama looks forward to cooperating with Israel in the next few months and years on promoting mutual interests including reaching a comprehensive Middle East peace deal.

Al-Quds runs an inside political cartoon of President Obama opening his office door on day 100, only to face another crisis - a large pig labeled "Swine Flu." Al-Ayyam continues the theme with an inside cartoon showing Obama calling for an open and civilized dialogue with the disease.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida's inside page runs an AFP story about recent bombings in Baghdad with a photo of American soldiers reviewing the shell of a burned-out car.

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Wednesday, April 29:

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Front pages reported on an April 28 press conference held in Jerusalem by the Al-Aqsa Waqf and Heritage Society. The group expressed concern about new Israeli plans to establish a ring of 100 synagogues around the Jerusalem Old City's Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida's front page reported that Palestinian Authority President Abbas received US Consul General Walles in Ramallah on April 28. According to coverage, Abbas briefed Walles on recent developments in the Palestinian Territories and efforts to advance the peace process.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

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1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title, "Awaiting the next dialogue session"(04/30): "the fourth round of national unity talks has concluded on a more positive..., the two parties [Fatah, Hamas] have noted that 'some progress has been achieved' ... Our people realize the dangers of division should it continue and the challenges facing our land if we don't unite...Therefore, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza should exert more pressure on their leaders to advance in this positive climate and achieve results."

2) Abdelmajid Swilim opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title, "Dialogue training"(04/30): "It seems that the national dialogue sessions now occur once a month or even more frequently, without yielding any tangible results except achieving some progress here and there... However, I believe that if the parties wanted to achieve [real] progress, they could have done it long time ago. The game being played now is how to waste... the most time. It looks like the parties are content to wait until the situation on the ground changes by itself... I say to those who are being trained on dialogue techniques, you can practice as much as you'd like, but the game has not even started yet and the referees have not shown up yet."

WALLES